

## **Small Print Deirdre Baker**

The Toronto Star

March 27, 2021 Saturday

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**Section:** BOOK; Pg. E6

**Length:** 651 words

**Byline:** Teaches Children's Literature At The University Of Toronto. Deirdre Baker

### **Body**

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Even in the midst of a global pandemic, there's no more vital or pressing issue for present and future life than that of climate change and climate justice. Kids' books reflect that: in fantasy, picture books, middle grade novels and more, climate and nature have an increasingly prominent place - but perhaps the first way to address the issue is directly.

In "How to Change Everything: The Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other," renowned journalist and activist Naomi Klein, with Rebecca Stefoff (Puffin, 321 pages, \$21.99, ages 10 and up), offers hope, information and a call to action. In assured, accessible mode, Klein moves from "Where We Are" to "How We Got Here" and, finally, the big one, "What Happens Next." Analysis of the fallout of the Industrial Revolution segues into the urgency of the Green New Deal and other approaches to repairing the health of our planet and its species, including our own.

For fans of YA fantasy, Kristin Cashore disrupts humano-centric thinking by a different route. In "Winterkeep" (Dial, 517 pages, \$25.99, ages 12 and up), the fourth of the "Graceling Realm" novels, Cashore turns away from fantasy's monarchical tropes to a democracy, one in which political will is yoked to enriching Winterkeep's wealthiest families. The daughter of two powerful politicians, Lovisa, is shattered when she happens upon her own parents' treachery. Among all the trauma of repairing what her parents have done, Lovisa has new ideas about what Winterkeep's policies could be, including the role the country's indigenous telepathic foxes and marine mammals should be given in government.

In considering earth and sustainability, it's just sensible to turn to ways many Indigenous peoples recognize and live in connection with the Earth and its many forms of life. In "Stand Like a Cedar" (Highwater, 40 pages, \$19.95, ages five to nine), Nicola Campbell, a poet and storyteller from the N e?kepmx nation in B.C., offers a poetic song about excursions into the wild throughout the seasons - to gather "spring time roots and bitter shoots," pick mountain berries, or fish for salmon in the fall. Abundance, respect, gratitude and intergenerational closeness suffuse Campbell's poem, in part through the inclusion of words in multiple Interior Salish languages. At their best, Carrielynn Victor's illustrations reflect a lovely diaphanous beauty.

Indigenous culture is also celebrated in a gathering of short stories, "Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids" (Heartdrum, 312 pages, \$21, ages eight to 12), edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith. By a variety of Indigenous writers, each story focuses on a child travelling from a nation somewhere in North America to be part of the Dance for Mother Earth Powwow in Michigan. Each child has their own struggle: finding the courage to fancy dance for the first time; discovering the power in their Native language; learning about their own culture, despite having grown up without it. The collection's strength is the rich variety of contemporary Indigenous experience, families and culture it portrays.

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And finally, in an entirely different mode, Angie Thomas's "Concrete Rose" (Balzer and Bray, 362 pages, \$24.99, ages 12 and up), prequel to her popular "The Hate U Give," is the heartwarming, highly readable story of 17-year-old Maverick, gang member and drug dealer, who has just had the baby he fathered on a one-night stand delivered into his arms - and left there. Brought up with a strong sense of family love and responsibility, Mav accepts without question his obligation to the baby, but how is he going to support him? Thomas's strong rhythms and vivid, colloquial style give this almost compulsive momentum, echoing the powerful love and humour, seriousness and sorrow, that pulses through this tale of Black boyhood and manhood.

Deirdre Baker teaches children's literature at the University of Toronto.

## **Classification**

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Journal Code:** TTA

**Subject:** CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (90%); CLIMATE ACTION (90%); CLIMATE CHANGE (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (90%); FANTASY LITERATURE (90%); FICTION LITERATURE (90%); MAMMALS (89%); NOVELS & SHORT STORIES (89%); WRITERS (89%); INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (88%); POETRY (84%); BOOK REVIEWS (79%); CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION & POLICY (78%); FAMILY (78%); GREEN DEALS (78%); JOURNALISM (78%); LIFE FORMS (78%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (78%); WILDLIFE (77%); DEMOCRACIES (73%); MARINE MAMMALS (73%); PANDEMICS (73%); FISHES (72%); ELECTIONS & POLITICS (70%); TYPES OF GOVERNMENT (70%); MONARCHIES (65%); WEALTHY PEOPLE (50%)

**Industry:** WRITERS (89%); BOOK REVIEWS (79%); GREEN DEALS (78%); SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (78%)

**Geographic:** EARTH (93%); MICHIGAN, USA (74%); NORTH AMERICA (79%)

**Load-Date:** March 27, 2021

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